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FM AMEMBASSY PRAGUE  
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INFO RUEHZL/EUROPEAN POLITICAL COLLECTIVE IMMEDIATE

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 PRAGUE 000604

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E.O. 12958: DECL: 09/11/2018  
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SUBJECT: CZECH GREEN PARTY CONGRESS: BURSIK HANGS ON AS  
PARTY CHAIR, COALITION SAFE FOR NOW

Classified By: DEPUTY CHIEF OF MISSION MARY THOMPSON-JONES FOR REASONS  
1.4 (b) & (d).

11. (C) Summary: On September 5-7, an extraordinary congress of the Czech Green Party featured a battle over the party leadership and over the overall direction of the party. Current party chair Martin Bursik was reelected and succeeded in having his opponents removed from the party leadership. However, the party remains deeply divided over personal and ideological issues. Bursik,s reelection assures the continued participation of the Greens in the governing coalition for the near future and avoids a cabinet reshuffle. Yet the Greens, internal problems suggest that the governing of the current coalition will continue to be difficult and parliamentary politics will be complex. End Summary.

#### Bursik Seeks to Strengthen Shaky Position

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12. (U) While other political parties have been trying to demonstrate unity and hide internal disputes prior to the October regional and Senate elections, Green Party Chair Martin Bursik called an extraordinary party congress for September 5-7. According to media accounts and Bursik,s statements, one of the reasons was to send a signal to the voters that it is still worth voting Green. Recent public opinion polls had shown that 38 percent of Green Party voters in the June 2006 parliamentary elections now regretted their vote. Even more importantly, Bursik sought to stabilize his shaky position and mend a rift between two wings of his party which threatened to even further erase voter support, condemning the Greens to political oblivion.

#### A Clear Bursik Victory in Party Leadership

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13. (U) During the election of the party leadership on September 6, Bursik convincingly defeated his main rival Dana Kuchtova, gaining 227 out of 350 votes (Kuchtova received 109). Moreover, Bursik supporters won all the deputy chair and party presidium positions. Current Education Minister Ondrej Liska was elected first deputy chairman, replacing Kuchtova and leaving her completely out of the party leadership. Bursik also managed to get a majority in the party's Control and Review Commission, which will be vital in handling expected challenges from Kuchtova to the legality of the extraordinary congress. Kuchtova's supporters, however, were able to use procedural rules and filibustering tactics to postpone decisions on several important issues, including amendments to party statutes.

#### Failure on Procedural Issues Leaves Party Divided

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14. (U) Bursik,s failure to amend party statutes leaves key issues for the next party congress in 2009. For now, the party's National Council,, an internal policy-making body, remains autonomous from the Green Party leadership and is likely to serve as a platform for Bursik,s opponents. Both

Kuchtova and Bursik critic Olga Zubova remain on the National Council as representatives of their respective regions.

#### Personal, Ideological Differences

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15. (SBU) While Bursik left the congress personally strengthened, the party's division into two wings remains very sharp and personal animosities remain strong. However, the friction in the party goes far beyond just personal animosities. Bursik supports crucial health care and pension reforms advocated by senior coalition partner ODS. He is also close to the ODS on missile defense. Unlike the radicals in the party, he believes that the ability of the Green Party to implement its program has been proportionate to its six percent result in the last parliamentary elections.

16. (SBU) On the other hand, Kuchtova and the young radicals backing her are fierce opponents of missile defense and more to the left on social and health care issues. They strongly criticize Bursik for not being able to push more Green Party priorities through the cabinet. They are generally disappointed with what they perceive as the Greens, low-level participation in the ODS-led coalition government and suggest withdrawal. The congress did nothing to narrow the political gap between the two wings.

#### Internal Divisions Came After a Good Start

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17. (U) Such a bleak situation seemed unlikely two years ago.

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After the June 2006 parliamentary elections, the Green Party had many reasons to celebrate. Not only did it enter into the Chamber of Deputies for the first time in its sixteen-year history, but it also became a member of the coalition government half a year later. It received four seats in the cabinet and its chairman became deputy prime minister.

18. (U) Things were working well for the Greens until one of its four ministers, then-Minister of Education, Kuchtova, was forced to resign in October 2007 due to an alleged inability to properly manage EU funds. Kuchtova left the job embittered by a perceived lack of support from Bursik and aligned herself with a more radical wing of the party. The presidential election in February 2008 caused further tensions within the party. While chairman Bursik strongly campaigned for Jan Svejnar, Vaclav Klaus was reelected, partially thanks to the absence of Green MP Olga Zubova.

#### Impact on the Czech Government Coalition

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19. (C) Bursik's reelection is a relief to coalition partners ODS and PM Topolánek. At the September 4 Strategic Dialogue in Washington, DFM Pojar said the government was watching the Greens congress carefully and hoping the right people, would win. There was no doubt who he meant. The U.S. was also asked to delay any announcement on the conclusion of the SOFA until September 5, in order to avoid affecting the Greens congress. Kuchtova claimed that she did not intend to leave and destroy the government coalition if elected, but the wing she represents opposes missile defense, a position wholly unacceptable to PM Topolánek. Some ODS ministers, including Minister of Labor and Social Affairs Petr Necas, were concerned that, despite her promises not to leave the coalition, a Kuchtova victory would mean the fall of the government.

110. (C) Bursik's victory assures the continued participation of the Green Party in the government for the near future. It also avoids a cabinet reshuffle: DPM Bursik, FM Schwarzenberg, Minister of Education Liska and Minister for

Human Rights Stehlikova stay in their positions. All support the government's reform agenda, including missile defense (with the exception of Liska, who still has some reservations on MD, and abstained at September 10 cabinet vote approving the SOFA).

#### Impact on Parliament

¶11. (C) The parliamentary situation is more complex. Green MPs Zubova and Jakubova are unpredictable. Although they are rivals of Bursik, they have not been specific about their political agenda, aside from their opposition to missile defense. Yet their votes are critical for the coalition's reform agenda and their pQnce in the parliamentary caucus is vital for its very existence: given the procedural rules of the lower house, the caucus might cease to exist if they leave. One test might come as soon as November 2008 when the main opposition Social Democrats (CSSD) are likely to initiate a vote of no-confidence.

¶12. (C) The situation is even more complicated after the recent revelation of a blackmailing plot directed partly at Zubova by a young ODS MP, Jan Morava. This could distance Zubova even further from the coalition. PM Topolanek appears to realize the danger: he personally apologized to Zubova and also delivered a very emotional speech denouncing the plot at the Green Party congress.

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